

Washington, DC □ In honor of Memorial Day, Rep. Linda Sánchez (D-CA) donated 25,000 of her unused frequent flyer miles to turn them into "Hero Miles," for the Operation Hero Miles program that provides free plane tickets for the family members of wounded troops.

"Sometimes the love and familiar face of a family member is the best medicine to help a servicemember recover from an injury," said Rep. Linda Sánchez. "It is with deep respect that I offer this small gesture to support our men and women in uniform and make it just a little bit easier for them to see their families."

About Operation Hero Miles

Operation Hero Miles was created by Congressman C.A. Dutch Ruppersberger (D-MD) in 2003, after visiting BWI-Thurgood Marshall Airport. At that time, military personnel on R & R leave were dropped off in Baltimore and forced to pay their way home from there. The Congressman worked together with the airlines and created "Operation Hero Miles" to give the troops free plane tickets home. Now that R & R travel is paid for by the military, "Operation Hero Miles" gives family members of wounded servicemen and women free plane tickets to travel to a military hospital to be by the bedside of injured loved one.

Operation Hero Miles gives ordinary citizens an opportunity to help our troops in a very direct way that makes a real difference in their lives. The program is brilliant in its simplicity. For more information on donating, or to see if you are eligible for a ticket, visit www.heromiles.org.

Congress has made historic gains for America's Troops, Veterans, and Military Families. Among these accomplishments include a New GI Bill to restore the promise of a full, four-year college education for Iraq and Afghanistan veterans, the largest increase in history for veterans' health care and other services, and significant strides in rebuilding the American military and strengthening other benefits for our troops and military families.

VIETNAM VETERANS

Every Congress, Rep. Sánchez introduces a "Welcome Home Vietnam Veterans Day" resolution to help honor and recognize the many Vietnam veterans who returned to the United States in the 1960's and 1970's without a formal "thank you" or "welcome home" as has traditionally been given to returning service members in our nation.

In addition, Sánchez attends a "Welcome Home Vietnam Veterans" event in her district to celebrate and honor veterans. This year, she was proud to secure medals for Mr. Frank Gonzales, of Whittier, CA who served in the U.S. Army, including a tour of duty in Vietnam. Rep. Sánchez helped him to receive his 12 earned medals, including the Purple Heart for injuries sustained in combat and the Bronze Star for saving the life of a fellow soldier.

EXPANDING ECONOMIC OPPORTUNITY

" New GI Bill for the 21st Century takes effect August 1 to restore promise of a full, four-year college education for veterans of Iraq and Afghanistan; veterans can sign up now.

" Gives businesses a \$2,400 tax credit for hiring unemployed veterans.

- " Provides nearly 2 million disabled veterans a \$250 Economic Recovery payment.

- " Expands relief, homeownership opportunities, and refinancing options for returning veterans through VA home loans.

- " Creates a new Veterans Corps to provide services to veterans and military families, as well as creates volunteer opportunities for veterans.

STRENGTHENING HEALTH CARE

- " Increases funding for veterans' health care and other services by \$17.7 billion (more than 40%) since January 2007 -- including the largest single increase in the history of the VA. This is more of an increase in less than three years than the Republican-controlled Congress provided in 12 years.

- " Strengthens quality health care for 5.8 million patients -- adding more than 8,000 new doctors and nurses since 2007

- " Veterans' budget this year, which was hailed as "cause for celebration" by the American Legion, provides veterans' health care and other services the largest funding increase (nearly 12%) ever requested by a President.

- Expands mental health screening and treatment

- Ends Bush's ban on enrolling modest-income veterans for VA health care

- Allows Congress to provide VA medical investments one year in advance to ensure sufficient, timely and predictable funding

- Strongly supported by major veterans' organizations, including the Veterans of Foreign Wars, Paralyzed Veterans of America, Disabled American Veterans, Vietnam Veterans of America, and Iraq and Afghanistan Veterans of America

- " Cleans up the scandal of inadequate support for our wounded soldiers at Walter Reed Army Medical Center and facilities nationwide.

- Improves outpatient medical care, restores integrity, and efficiency to disability evaluations, cuts red-tape

- Smooths the transition from the Armed Forces to VA system -- implementing a single, accurate, paperless health record from enlistment through retirement

- Rebuilds and renovates VA and military hospitals

- " Strengthens mental health services critical to the estimated 620,000 troops returning from Iraq or Afghanistan who suffer from Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD), depression, or traumatic brain injuries (TBI).

- Invests in DOD research for TBI and PTSD, along with counseling, suicide prevention, telehealth, and risk reduction efforts for troops and families

- Establishes comprehensive suicide prevention services for veterans and a 24-hour tollfree suicide hotline, helping to prevent an estimated 1,200 suicides in the first year

- " Eliminates the TRICARE and veterans health care fee increases proposed by President Bush.

IMPROVING BENEFITS FOR TROOPS AND MILITARY FAMILIES

- " Gives troops a pay raise of 3.5 percent in 2008 and 3.9 percent in 2009 -- larger than the Bush budget in both years.

- " Retroactively provides more than 170,000 service members and veterans with \$500 for every month they were forced to serve under stop-loss orders since 2001.

- " Addresses the 396,000 veterans' claims backlog and the 177-day average wait for veterans

to access earned benefits by adding 7,100 new claims processors.

" Builds new transition centers for wounded warriors, more military child care centers, better barracks, and military family housing.

" Provides Family Medical Leave for families of soldiers wounded in combat.

" Reduces Military Families Tax on surviving spouses.

REBUILDING THE AMERICAN MILITARY

" Provides troops in Iraq and Afghanistan with better equipment, including Mine Resistant Ambush Protected (MRAP) vehicles proven to save lives.

" Creates a Strategic Reserve Readiness Fund to rapidly address military equipment shortfalls.

" Ensures more equipment, training, and body armor for troops.

" Strengthens National Guard preparedness for disaster response here at home, including providing more equipment.